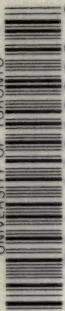


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Cotswold Characters
by
John Drinkwater

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Cotswold Characters.

Reprints from
The Yale Review.

A Book of Yale Review Verse,
1917.

War Poems from The Yale
Review, 1918.

War Poems from The Yale
Review (2d Edition), 1919.

Four Americans, by Henry
A. Beers, 1919.

American and British Verse
from The Yale Review, 1920.

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COTSWOLD CHARACTERS

BY
JOHN DRINKWATER

With five engravings on wood by Paul Nash.



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New Haven,
Yale University Press,
London, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press,
Mdecccxxi.



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Foreword.

THE Cotswold country is, as I think, the most beautiful in England. Not that it is by nature more lovely than that which, perhaps, any county can show. It is a commonplace to us who know this small country of ours that there is hardly any stretch of twenty miles in it which does not flatter us in the belief that there is no more tender or subtle landscape on earth. But the Cotswolds, especially in the more secluded corners, have the added glory of an almost unbroken tradition of character and of building. The country from which these sketches sprang is high up above the great Stroud valley, the neighborhood of the famous wool-staplers of the sixteenth century, when the Cotswold flocks brought those merchants to a prosperity which they spent partly making themselves noble dwelling-places out of the lovely Cotswold stone. The country then bred a great race of masons, and the stock has never died out. I am myself the tenant of a small cottage on a

Foreword.

byway that is passed by a stranger hardly once in a week. It is four rooms big. Eighty years ago two of them were built by a local craftsman who knew neither better nor worse than his ancestors nearly three hundred years back. And then ten years ago my present landlord added the other two, and he, again, worked with the same unquestioning and perfect mastery. So it is that the whole countryside is covered with an architecture which has never lost its vitality. It is not a question of copying with skill a fine tradition gone by. Here we have, rather, the real life which consists of a personal contribution to a tradition that has never died out. And, as it is in the building, which from the great manor house down to the pigsties has an equal dignity because of this unbroken succession of life, so it is with the character of the people. The Cotswold yeoman is as unoriginal and as new and vital as an oak tree or a starry night. In a moment a little outside the usual habit of my work, it came to me to set down in

Foreword.

prose a few of his characteristics, and here is the result with a due sense of its incompleteness.

JOHN DRINKWATER.

London,

August, 1921.



THESIGER CROWNE, The Mason.

LEANING with arms folded upon his garden gate by which hardly anybody ever passed, Thesiger Crowne bade me good evening. His cottage was in a by-lane of a village that is in itself in an undiscovered pocket of the Cotswolds. He was a widow man, as they say, and one

Thesiger Crowne.

elderly daughter lived with him. He looked very handsome this evening. He had a stout frame, tall, and he was rather a dandy, with the dandy's proper respect for a natural tradition. He was a yeoman villager some generations deep, and he would have scorned to confuse his class with any other. He had been into the market town to-day, so that his dress was as it might be Sunday, with a lay touch of difference. His boots were of the sort in which he had years ago learnt to walk as many miles as might be, daily in all weathers. His corduroy trousers, originally buff in color, had been bleached by repeated washings. Over his cotton shirt, set off by a linen collar with no tie, in place of a coat he wore a sleeved waistcoat, the sleeves of lining cloth, the rest of a dark honey-colored velveteen. His very white hair and whiskers surrounded a very red face, ample but well shaped, and, as though to remind some of us who play at being countrymen what the real thing is, he wore a hard black bowler hat of rather fashionable shape.

Thesiger Crowne.

"Good evening, Mr. Crowne," I replied. "I hope you're well."

"Well, that I baint so much. The indigestion it is. I do have often to sit up in bed of a night." I commiserated with him. I asked him if he had seen a doctor.

"Doctors—no. I've made a shift to do without they so far, and that's a deal of time. It's a rest I do want. If I live, I shall be seventy-seven come Ciceter Mop.* I've done a deal of hard work in my time, and I think it be about time for I to take a rest. Not that I should be surprised, mark you, if I did live to be a hundred and two." Presumably the record for the village was held at present by a hundred and one.

A deal of hard work in his time. He was a mason, one of the old Cotswold breed, and his handiwork is in every town and village within twenty miles of the hamlet that had been his home for seventy-seven years. Even beyond that, for the build-

*Ciceter Mop is one of the many annual Fairs held in the small towns of England. Some of them are many generations old.

Thesiger Crowne.

ers recognized his skill, and he had been known to travel on his trade into the further midlands, into Sussex, once even far across into Norfolk. At sixty-six, he told me, he had had a job that for eighteen weeks meant a six-mile walk in the morning, a day's work, and six miles home at night. He had never been out of England, and I talked to him a little of foreign countries. "Did you ever go to China, sir?" Thesiger had a gift of irony. I had to confess that I had not been there. "It must be a rare place, China. But no man can go everywhere. That's how I look at it."

He had a grandson living in the village, one who had fallen from the high craft of masonry to miscellaneous jobbing. Thesiger remembered that when he himself was a boy he used to go with his father to work in a near town. His own wages were sixpence a week, and his father drew seven shillings, a considerable share of which was paid in kind—pig's fry and chitlings. He remembered his mother washing them at the spring and

Thesiger Crowne.

selling them to people on the spot. Now his grandson, born and bred in the same place, had been asked for an estimate for whitewashing four cottage rooms. No painting or other work was to be done. His estimate was nineteen pounds. Hearing of the prices that were being paid, he had lost his head and estimated wildly, it is true. But nineteen pounds for, at most, three days' work, and his great grandfather sixty-odd years ago at seven shillings a week, partly paid in kind. It is a fantastic epitome of the wage madness that has been besetting the world.

One of his cheeks was furrowed by a deep scar, an honorable wound from a somewhat strange action that made history in the village forty years since. On an outlying road had stood an ancient pest-house, which, during an outbreak of small-pox in a town six miles away, the urban authorities had decided to appropriate for the severer cases. Indignation in Thesiger's village at once rose to determined fury. The first van was met by the inhabitants, the horses turned on the road, and

Thesiger Crowne.

the driver threatened into retreat. One of the patients died on the return journey. Open war followed, and the van came back with a strong police escort. Thesiger led his fellows, indignation now in full cry, to the pest-house, and in a few minutes the building was in flames. The charred ruins are still there. The police saw that no more was to be done, but in a scuffle before they left, Thesiger took the mark of a truncheon on his cheek for life. And he and four others helped to make the reputation of a defending counsel, since famous in legal history, at the next Gloucester assizes.

Thesiger had a turn for reading. His was a mixed fare of out-of-date history books and the wilder kind of romance. Out of this learning he had developed a curious but rather proud little self-deception. He told me he was descended from Oliver Cromwell. He offered no explanation of his dignity, merely asserting it. But tactful inquiries in the village did not result in any support of his claim. Indeed, it appeared that it was the effect rather of

Thesiger Crowne.

a general affinity for the great of name than of any particular kinship. It seemed that at times he would transfer his ancestral honors to the Duke of Marlborough, sometimes to Wat Tyler, and on one uproarious occasion at the Chippendale Arms he had been heard to declare with circumstantial fervor that he was in the direct line of descent from Robinson Crusoe.

Somewhere back in his family history, a century and more ago, had been a tragedy. There had been a case of sheep-stealing, a broken-hearted daughter, a betrayal, and a drowning. I fancy to myself that it was Nan Hardwick, Mr. Masfield's Nan. Thesiger reckons that those were callous times anyway; you had to be built of hard stuff then. For himself, he earned a pound a week until he stopped regular work. Now he is seventy-seven, and to-morrow morning he will walk across to the far village to draw his weekly old-age pension, ten shillings. Time for I to take a rest, indeed. But he looks good for his hundred and two yet.



SIMON RODD, The Fisherman.

SIMON RODD'S name was a lucky accident. He was eighty years old, and lived in a small shop at Laneton, a little market town on the fringes of Oxfordshire. The shop was now managed by his son, Simon being deaf and not so keen of sight as he was. The establishment

Simon Rodd.

dealt in a variegated stock—stationery, cheap jewelry, popular literature, quack medicines, peppermints, photographic views, gimcrack ornaments. In these and their like Simon had long since ceased to take any interest. They were the chaffer-wares of necessity, and had never been in his line. But a pile of cardboard boxes at one end of the counter always kept his attention. From the inner parlor, where he sat for long hours in vacancy or meditation, he would keep an eye on them. When he saw a customer's hand move towards them, he would get up and step by step drift into the shop. He was a sleeping partner in the business now, it was true, but no one else really knew about those boxes. They contained artificial flies. As he watched one lid after another being taken off, displaying a glorious range of colored wings, ginger-quills and iron-blues, nut-brown alders, snowy-white coachmen and black gnats, his faded eyes would lighten with an old eagerness, and he would bide his time.

Simon Rodd.

For Simon Rodd was a fisherman. Not like Simon Peter who caught his multitudes crudely in nets, nor as those who go out with floats and worms, tired anglers, but one of the elect, a fly-fisherman, and dry-fly at that. Laneton is famous for its chalk stream, running midway across the town itself, and when he was twelve Simon had cast his first fly. At seventy-five the hand had grown infirm, and he could no longer see the cocked wings floating down the stream towards him. So that now he had retired to the parlor, listening to ignorance in the shop beyond, making his occasional excursions into publicity when the fly-boxes were in play. And then if you behaved with proper humility, he would respond and give out of the store of his experience.

I turned up at Laneton in May-fly time, an unbroken novice. Everybody, I knew, was looking amusedly at my new rod, my new bag, my new waders and brogues. The Boots at the hotel was a diplomat, assuming that all my old gear had been worn out in hard service. I took the bold

Simon Rodd.

course, and confided in him that it was my first equipment, which he very well knew. Sitting in the garden at tea, I struck up an acquaintance with an old hand who had flies sprinkled about his hat. Him too I let into the secret, and showed him my fly-box, splendid with an assortment of plumed and speckled May-flies from London. He looked rather coldly upon them, but spoke civilly. These fellows are not bad sorts, they remember sometimes their own green days. He recommended a visit to Simon Rodd. "He ties a special fly for the stream. Get the old man himself if you can. He knows ten times as much about it as his son."

I stepped across the road to the shop. A young assistant was serving, and I asked him for some flies. He slid the boxes along the glass counter towards me, and left me to my choice. I lifted a lid, and saw nothing very likely. Had they any May-flies? An under box was pulled out, and there, wing and hackle, lay a profusion of dark, silver-gray beauties. Were these particularly good for this river? Yes,

Simon Rodd.

they were the Laneton Marquis. I put a few on the palm of my hand, and made a pretense of critical examination. As I did so I was aware of somebody standing in the shadow of a door behind the assistant, waiting. I looked up, and saw an old man in a shiny black alpaca coat. He observed my critical air with a courteous indifference.

"Is this the Laneton Marquis?" I inquired, by way of an opening.

"Yes," said Simon Rodd, "that's it."

"I'm told it's very good for the Chedd."

"I've done pretty well with it, sir."

Seeing that for more than fifty years he had taken an average of something like four brace of fish a day with this fly during the May-fly season, it was not too much to say. I capitulated at once. "I'm afraid I don't know anything about this job. What do you advise?" Immediately he was all grace. Near the town I was to use the winged variety, further up-stream, above the hut, he would suggest the hackle, the natural fly generally being rather spent there. In the evening the

Simon Rodd.

hackle all along the river, though then sometimes an alder was good even while the May-fly was up. Would I mind being shown what he considered the best way of tying the fly to the point? I should be very grateful. With trembling fingers and straining eyes he threaded the gut, deftly made a loop, gave a little tug, and handed it to me. "You'll find that after a day or two you can do that in the dark." Skeptically I thanked him, took my flies of his selection, and went out. "If you want to know anything, perhaps I can tell you more than some of the others."

He could have told me, but I could not have learnt. He had lived dry-fly for sixty years, and I must hope for half of that to learn half that he could tell. For he could not now be said consciously to know anything, it was all nature to him. Sometimes in the evening, when the fishermen had come in, I would see Simon Rodd walking, with hurried short steps, without infirmity, towards the river, walking-stick in hand. One night I followed him idly in the dusk. He came to the river-bank and

Simon Rodd.

stopped. He looked up and down, his eyes covering by habit the water that he could no longer see clearly. Then he moved on slowly, measuring the stream, here and there leaning out towards bushy channels, sometimes peering intently at what seemed to be a sucking at the surface of the water. Presently at a fast-running pool below a stretch of stone wall he paused again. He looked across for a few moments. Then his right elbow went to his side, the walking-stick was raised and, beautifully timed by his wrist, went to and fro—one, two, three, four—and then the cast was made. I knew how the gut flew full out to the end, the rod well up, how perfectly that imaginary fly fell thirty-five feet away just above the rising fish. He was about to strike when he saw me. In the fading light I had come up nearer to him than I realized. I begged his pardon. He was not at all put out. "There was always a big one there," he said. "I know, but I find it difficult to get my fly over so far." "Difficult," he answered, "why no—it's like this"—and again the

Simon Rodd.

walking-stick flickered in the dusk, and again the fly fell two feet above the rise, as livingly plain as though the line were truly running through its rod firmly held in the hand that could never be firm again.



RUFUS CLAY, The Foreigner.

ONE evening as I was walking down the road with Thesiger Crowne, we passed a long-striding, heavily bearded man, wearing a slouch hat, baggy coat and trousers, and shabby black leggings falling well down on to his boots. He was carrying a gun, and beside him trotted a

Rufus Clay.

large retriever dog. I had not seen him before.

"Who is that?" I inquired of Thesiger.

"Rufus Clay," he answered. "He's a foreigner."

Signs of red hair at birth may have encouraged his parents to call him Rufus, but it certainly turned out to be a misnomer. His full beard was black, and his complexion swarthy, but I thought the man looked English.

"A foreigner? What is he—a Spaniard?"

"Spaniard?" said Thesiger. "No. He comes from Pinswick."

"You mean he lives there?"

"No. He do not live there. He do live here."

Pinswick is a village seventeen miles away, on the other side of the county. I was puzzled.

"But you said he was a foreigner."

"Yes, he be a foreigner. He's a Pinswicker."

"But how long has he lived here?" I persisted.

Rufus Clay.

“Oh, not above ten or twelve years.”

I had been Thesiger's neighbor for eighteen months, and I came from five counties away. As he spoke, I supposed that he must look upon me as something out of the sea at least, though we always seemed to be very good friends. I discovered that nothing short of two generations of unbroken tenure constitutes native rights. Settlers, if only from the next parish, are foreigners, and openly called so. For casual pass-the-time-of-day acquaintance, even for neighborly talk, this is no particular disability, but if you come with the intention of carrying on business, you are likely to be disillusioned, as Rufus Clay learnt.

A few days later I found his house. It was buried behind high walls, not visible from the road. There was nothing mysterious about it, but unless you had special occasion to go in, it was out of sight and out of mind. Rufus had set up as a cobbler, coming to the place when he was between forty and fifty, with a small bag full of savings. On a broken board over

Rufus Clay.

the wall door was written, "Rufus Clay. Cobbler. Repairs neatly executed." But in a month he found that for trade he might as suitably have gone to a city of the dead. Why he had stayed on for the ten years nobody inquired, and he himself did not seem to know. I was told that he had a large kitchen garden, and sold some of the produce on the rare occasions when anybody wanted to buy. I went in now and found him digging. I asked him if he could let me have some onions. He looked at me without saying anything, did not move for a few moments, then stuck his fork into the ground, and pulled up as many onions as he could hold by the tops in two large hands, and gave them to me.

"How much?" I asked.

"Oh, a penny."

"Only a penny?"

"It doesn't matter. Tuppence if you like."

I paid him, sorry that he had not asked more. As he put the coppers into his pocket, he remarked, "You're a foreigner

Rufus Clay.

too, aren't you?" He said it a little sadly, with a touch of bitterness.

"I suppose they would call me that," I answered.

"Yes, they would. Unnatural I call it."

"Don't you get on with the folk here?" I ventured.

"Get on—how the darnation can you get on? I don't know them, and they don't know me. Never will. It isn't civilized."

"You've been here a good many years now, haven't you?"

"Eleven years too long," was the reply. "I'm a gowk to have stuck it."

I asked him to have some tobacco, which he did. I wondered why he had stayed so long if he did not like it. It seemed that in the winter epidemic of 19— he had lost his wife and two children at a stroke, and had left Pinswick forever. He had settled down into his new quarters not hopefully, but without misgiving. The prejudice against "foreigners" had surprised him. He had no spirit to fight it, nor heart to move on. So that with his few pence saved and the help of a garden he had drifted

Rufus Clay.

along in a sullen but not actively resentful lethargy.

While we were talking, the retriever that had been on the road with him that evening lay on the earth among a not very prosperous crop of cabbages, at full stretch in the sun. He had taken no notice of my arrival, but as I bade Rufus good-day and turned to go he was at my side in an instant, spiny-furred and growling. His master called him to heel, and as he did so the affection in his voice was clear. It was the first sign he had given of any sustaining human warmth. "He's ten years old. He's all I've got," he said. "Him and high walls."

I found in the village that there was no antagonism towards Rufus Clay. He just didn't exist. What might have happened if he had been the sort to persevere in advances I can't say. After the first month or two of failure he had made none, and for all the thought he was given he might as well have been within the churchyard walls as his own. Now and again I went to him on some small marketing errand,

Rufus Clay.

and once in a while I would meet him on the road at nightfall, his gun on arm, and his one friend behind him. I never heard his name mentioned but once. On a late August evening in the Chippendale Arms there was a meeting to start the local football club on its way for the coming season. There was some difficulty in getting a sufficient number of willing and eligible people to serve on the committee. During a lull a youth, for want of something likelier to suggest, said, "What about Mr. Clay?" There was a rustle of disapproval, and I thought I heard a murmur of "foreigner" from the corner where the chairman, the Chippendale Arms host, was sitting. No other notice was taken of the question.

Then once again his name was spoken. Late in the following spring Thesiger Crowne, Tom Benton, Isaac Putter, Rawson Leaf, and myself with some others were standing by a gate at the village end, gossiping of nothing in particular. Beyond the gate a path ran some three-quarters of a mile, straight down

Rufus Clay.

through four meadows, to the bank of a derelict canal. A few yards along the bank to the right could be seen a disused lock. As we were talking, we saw the figure of Rufus Clay in the distance, walking along the bank with his dog, towards the path. No attention was paid until they reached the lock side. Then the retriever came to a sudden halt, barked excitedly, and in a moment disappeared over the side. We could see the man's agitation even at that distance, but still the talk was hardly interrupted. Then a strange thing happened. Rufus stood upright a moment, seemed to quiver, and plunged after his friend. At once we were in full flight down the field. It was too late. What had drawn the dog in, whether a rat or what else, no one knew. But the lock with its water fifteen feet below bank level, was a death trap. Both dog and man were past our help. It was an hour before they could be got out. And then Thesiger Crowne said, "A bad job that. Rufus Clay. These foreigners do never learn their way about."



PONY, The Footballer.

I DO not know what his other name was, or even the real one that was given him at his christening. Everyone in the village called him Pony. He was a grown youth, twenty years or so of age, large, with a handsome face but a rather dull eye. He had assiduity without direction.

Pony, the Footballer.

He was ostensibly the wheelwright's assistant, but he was hardly known to assist. He bustled about ardently, but no result came of his bustling, as no plan preceded it. If he was sent out on two errands he would return proud in the accomplishment of one, having forgotten the other. Like the clown in the circus he contributed an amiable disorder to the work of the world, but what was art in the clown was nature in him. Being told by his mistress to post some letters and feed the fowls, he deposited the letters in the corn-bin, did his feeding, and went happily home. His was not the abstraction of the poet; he just wasn't equal to the complex demands of life. Friendly, willing, honest, he had neither initiative nor reliability. He was born to sit in the sun, but, with a living to be made, his best hope was a job with no uncertain humors in it, stone-breaking or leading plough.

To have to do with Pony was generally to be vexed with him, yet nobody disliked him. Even his master, who betongued him in an infinite series of terms, had no

Pony, the Footballer.

thought of dismissing him. He was glad not to be disliked, and far from indifferent to the ratings that he daily earned. He had, somewhere in the shadows of his mind, a wistful longing for efficiency. He wanted very much to be as clever as other people, realizing forlornly that he never could be. His master, the masons, Mr. Thorn the baker, Philip the shepherd, who always seemed to contrive a fold full of healthy lambs at the right time, Mrs. Murgatroyd at the Post Office, who could register letters and reckon up about insurance stamps and money-orders, Roger Stone, who drove a traction engine—all seemed miracles of competence to him. Watching them, he would make little resolutions to himself, but they faded always. Pony had heart but no brains, and that was an end of it. Sometimes his vagaries had a spice of the unexpected in them, but for the most part his was a routine of uninspired stupidity. Once he got into disgrace, when, with native ineptness, he chose Felicity Pratt, the constable's daughter, for an amatory impulse, and

Pony, the Footballer.

kissed her. His ears were boxed, but no worse came of it. He relapsed into his uneasy obscurity. And then his day of glory came.

It was a Saturday at the end of February. An unwonted crowd had assembled on the village football ground. The local team was to meet Edge Albion, their rivals from across the valley, in the semi-final of the Cotswold Cup. Not for years had athletic excitement run so high. Both teams had had a highly successful season, and were neck-and-neck for honors in the Ciceter League. The winners of this afternoon's match were almost sure of the cup, neither of the other semi-finalists being fancied for a chance. It was thought that the advantage of ground would just about see the home team through, but half an hour before the kick-off several hundred Edge supporters made it clear that their favorites were not going to fall through lack of support. At twenty minutes past two the Edge eleven, in blue jerseys and white shorts, came on to the ground to try their paces. They were

Pony, the Footballer.

greeted with a roar. Then, to a thunder of cheers, seven or eight of the home team followed, green and black, and gave a turn of their quality at the opposite goal. The ground was bubbling with excitement, which became particularized as it was seen that the home captain with his vice-captain and another leader of the team were in earnest discussion with the club officials outside the wooden shanty that served as pavilion and dressing-rooms. A minute later a rumor was flying round the ground. Bob Duckers, the inside left, had suddenly been taken ill and could not play. A strong second eleven was away from home, and difficult as it was to muster twenty-two players at any time, there were no reserves. Consternation was abroad.

Now, Pony was a footballer. Not that he had ever played in a match, even for the second eleven. But he had cut down an old pair of trousers, somehow come by a discarded pair of football boots, and every Saturday appeared on the ground, to join in the kick-about before the match began.

Pony, the Footballer.

Once, in a practice game at the opening of the season, he had been allowed to play full back, when he twice kicked the ball through his own goal, and in a collision with his fellow back, who was captain of the first eleven, he brought that Olympian so heavily to the ground that he was unable to play in the first two matches of the year. But, although he could but have a stray kick, Pony loved the game, and he eagerly followed the fortunes of his club, the half-crown subscription to which he saved with great diligence each summer. Every member of the team was to him a hero "sans peur et sans reproche," and to-day they were all dedicated to a cause in which gods would be jealous to contend.

On so august an occasion, Pony had not ventured on to the playing area, but he was there, dressed as by habit, though wearing a shabby overcoat to hide what he feared might be taken as a presumption. As the rumor reached him, he was sick with apprehension. Bob Duckers was one of the cracks; this was altogether too bad. He hated Edge more than ever. Then

Pony, the Footballer.

some nerve of almost dead ambition was startled in him. Little by little he sidled towards the group of arguing players and officials. He could hear them talking. "We can't play ten men—it will throw all the balance out as you might say." "It's no good—the doctor forbids it." "He were perfectly well this morning." "We ought to have scratched the second eleven." Pony was trembling as he listened. Then the captain's eye fell on him. Something was said, which he could not hear. "Pony," the captain called out, "you'll have to play." Then he was instructed. He was to be inside left, and he was to interfere between the centre and the outside as little as possible. He took off his coat, and went on to the field. As he appeared there was a shout of laughter from the home spectators. They could laugh themselves silly for all Pony cared. He had gone to heaven. He heard the whistle blow.

It was a terrific struggle, on a slow, slippery ground. Pony did as he had been told, and hardly touched the ball. At half-time no goal had been scored. The Edge

Pony, the Footballer.

supporters were in high spirits. If they could make a draw here, they were confident of the result in the re-play on their own ground. Early in the second half, which began in a light fog, Pony came to grief. The left half presented the inside right with a perfect opening. The forward was about to take it, when Pony, who had nothing whatever to do with the movement, was off-side, and the chance was lost. The captain remonstrated, and there were angry ejaculations round the field. Then, a few minutes later, the centre forward, with the ball at his foot, found himself beautifully placed. He poised himself to shoot. As he did so, Pony, who was out of position, dashed, impelled by some devil of mischance, excitedly across the goal mouth. The centre made no mistake; the ball flew from his foot far out of the goal-keeper's reach, driven towards the open corner of the net. Four yards from the goal it landed fairly on the small of Pony's back, and bounded high over the cross-bar. An exasperated howl, coming from players and spectators alike, rose on

Pony, the Footballer.

the foggy air. Tears of rage were in Pony's eyes. He felt that life was death and damnation.

The game went on, furiously, and still no score was made. Ten minutes from time a thicker bank of fog came across the field, and the players flitted like phantoms, their movements drawn, as it seemed to the spectators, into slow, rhythmic abstractions. In the higher circles of the game, the referee might have called a closure, but we do not allow these niceties. Five more minutes passed. Edge stock was very high indeed. Then upon Pony the glory descended. He seemed to be alone. A few players, hardly distinguishable, drifted about the fringes of the fog-ring that circled him. Suddenly the ball rolled before him, someone just behind it. It was the referee. Catching his foot on the ground, Pony gave the ball a kick, so that it went a few yards only. He ran after it, and gave it another kick, wild now, but again mistimed. Again he rushed in pursuit, and, as he reached it, a figure loomed up in front of him, not three paces

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away. It was the Edge goal-keeper. He was aware, in that tremendous moment, of ranks of straining faces beyond. He kicked in frenzy. The goal-keeper flung himself at full length, only to turn the flight of the ball a few feet as it passed into the net. One of the Edge backs, followed by a medley of players, crashed into Pony, and drove him back on into a goal-post. The referee's whistle blew, and the cries of pandemonium went up. The fog was lifting. Pony, stunned and shaken, was carried off the field. The ball went back to the centre, was kicked off, and time was called. We had gone into the final.

Pony, dazed but recovering, was the centre of enthusiasm such as was unknown in the history of the club. He was carried round the field, the team singing behind him that he was a jolly good fellow. The captain gave him a green and black jersey on the spot. The rector, who was president of the club, invited them all to supper at the Chippendale Arms that night. Pony was toasted, and was called upon for a

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speech. He stood up, and said that he thought the supper was a pretty good one, and that he hoped Bob Duckers wouldn't mind.

His glory did not come again. In fact, it was forgotten in a week by all but himself. A fortnight later the final tie was played on a neutral ground, six miles away. Pony walked, wearing his colors and the overcoat. But eleven men were there this time. He saw them win easily, by five goals. He saw them take the cup away, and on Monday he went to look at it in the parish room. He stood in front of it for a long time, by himself. And with it were eleven silver medals, each with a name engraved upon it, but his was not among them.





JOE PENTIFER and Son.

THATCH becomes rare in the Cotswolds, the young men finding it too slow and grave a craft to learn. Joe Pentifer was the last of the great thatchers. His long, stormy beard, and his thick hair, itself thatchlike, not so much white-seeming as bleached by many winds, made him

Joe Pentifer and Son.

a figure such as Blake might have added to his visionary portraits. Ezekiel or Aaron he should have been, but he was, he held, christened Joe, not even Joseph. He was a slow philosopher, mysteriously counting the numbers of the stars from old newspaper cuttings, or reminded by the sickle that he carried to his half-acre at harvest time that life too was but a span. Then he would be a little prolix, stroking his beard with patriarchal deliberation, so that people in a hurry would avoid him. Whatever wisdom may have been within, the world for others did not lighten under his scrutiny, and his discourses, not very justly perhaps, were commonly accounted dull. But no one ever disputed his one mastery. He knew the ways of straw as Praxiteles did of marble or Cellini of gold and silver. The yellow thatch worked under his hands to swift and even order, material as truly used, with a skill as personal, humble though it was, as that of those artists of a higher calling.

As he grew old, Joe left the business more to his son, who, to his lifelong cha-

Joe Pentifer and Son.

grin, was named Aesop. His heir had from early youth been bred to thatching, and had some proficiency in the job. But he was a continual scorn to his father, who was only forced by the necessity of the case at length to allow "Joe Pentifer and Son" to appear on the small bill-headings that a new generation demanded. Joe himself had always taken a pound a week for his work, never more nor less, and word of mouth and a hand to hand transaction had been good enough for him. With the coming of Aesop the old order had changed, but Joe accepted the new ways without approval, and partnership had no reality for him. Aesop was not a bungler, but he knew nothing of the secret magic, and his father saw no compensation for middling technique in an increased wage. The difference between the senior partner's handiwork and the junior's was a thing for fine perceptions only. Aesop, for all his father's care, was not aware of it. Sometimes when, sorely against his will, Joe had to relinquish a piece of work to his son, an untrained eye, or even a trained

Joe Pentifer and Son.

eye of the duller kind, would hardly detect the transition from genius to common talent. But Joe detected it, nor was it fancifully. The difference was there, plain enough to a sense sufficiently alert. It was as David Cox to Tom Collier, Worcester paste to Coalport.

For some time the hostility threw no sparks. Joe considered silk purses and sows' ears, and gave up trying to show the duller wit of Aesop what it could not understand. Aesop was aware of subtle and unspoken reproaches, and resented them, but there was nothing he could shape his tongue to. When there was a special piece of work to be done, the old man kept control, deputizing only when poor roofs were to be patched or new ones laid in secluded or impermanent corners. Aesop could not afford to quarrel about it. The business was not a rich one, but it was too good to lose, and his father had as well a snug reserve of two thousand pounds or so that had drifted to him from an intestate brother who had gone to New Zealand chiefly because he could not abide

Joe Pentifer and Son.

his family. So Aesop did not cultivate pride, being rather a politic man, as was remarked sometimes at the Chippendale Arms when the best was being said of the village. But disaster came nevertheless.

Sir John Toppingham was rebuilding his stables, and, because of the latest increase in cost of tiling, decided for thatch, giving the contract to Pentifer and Son. It was a long row of buildings, forming one boundary of the Green alongside the churchyard, a show site. Joe took the work in hand as a matter of course, and carried it on without even consulting Aesop until two-thirds of the roof was done. Then he slipped on the ladder and wrenched his foot. It meant lying up for a week or so, and as Sir John was in a hurry there was nothing for it but to let Aesop go on. Joe had put all his virtue into the work. He was getting old, and another chance of this size and importance might not come his way. He had meant it to be his masterpiece, and now . . . It was exasperating. He let Aesop see that it was exasperating.

At the end of the fourth day he hobbled

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out with two sticks. As he came into the Green the morning sun was in full flood upon the bright straw. At once his worst fears were realized. To you and to me the thatch might have seemed to be of a piece, but to Joe Pentifer the division of Aesop's work from his own was as marked as though someone had drawn a clear black line down the straw. He stared, and Aesop, busy on the ladder, did not know that he was being watched. Joe could see the fingers working wrongly, with no finesse. He loved thatch, he never knew how much until this moment, with the sun showing what the beauty of its perfection could be, and Aesop showing what perfection was not. For minutes he stared, and then he cried out—"Come down here. Stand back and look at it, and be ashamed."

Aesop looked round and came down. "What's that you say?" He had heard plainly enough, and now resentment was on top. "Look at it, and be ashamed," said Joe, lifting one of his sticks and pointing with indignation at the long,

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glowing roof. "Some folks can't tell between thatch and stubble, it do seem." Aesop snatched the raised stick from Joe's hand, and laid it in one sharp stroke across his father's shoulders. The old man looked at his son, saying nothing, nearer to Blake than ever, took back his stick, and hobbled away. In the evening Aesop offered a formal but not insincere apology. Joe did not reply.

Thereafter the incident was never referred to. Aesop did his best, and Joe thought as little of it as formerly. But as the senior partner's infirmities grew, more and more work came necessarily to Aesop's hand. A few people observed a lowering of the firm's standard, but by most it was unnoted. Aesop settled down comfortably to authority, and cherished schemes of advancement when he should be sole proprietor. There was the two thousand pounds, and but his mother to share it with him for her lifetime, he supposed, and one sister. There was a hay and corn business in Ciceter that might . . . These were days now for Aesop with

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every prospect pleasing. And then Joe died. His will was read, thus—"To my wife, Sarah, one thousand pounds and my household goods, and my two-thirds share interest in the business of Pentifer and Son, for the term of her life, and thereafter to my daughter, Ann, to whom also I leave one thousand pounds. Should my daughter predecease my wife, Sarah, then these bequests shall pass to my nephew, Barnabas Pentifer. And to my son, Aesop, I bequeath the stick with which he beat his father."



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Drinkwater, John
Cotswold characters

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